



# LOVE THAMIZH

Love Thamizh is a multilingual online journal with articles in English about the language history and culture of Tamilnadu and translations from Tamil and to Tamil

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# Tamil Hermeneutics - Writing Commentary in Tamil Tradition



**Dr. Anand Amaladass S. J.** Chennai.

There are several issues related to this theme. The term “hermeneutics” (science of interpretation) comes from the West. But its content is not unknown to other eastern traditions. Here a few aspects are highlighted from the Tamil tradition. Many scholars have already worked on this field. Here it is an attempt to bring together some specific areas to draw the attention of our readers for further research.



What does it mean to write a commentary? Why is it so important to study these writers? Birth of commentary requires two pre-conditions:

First of all, the root-text (*mūlam*) cannot be adapted, revised or rewritten (non-re-writable), has become canonized classical text. Secondly, this fixed text is no longer intelligible without explanation. The classical commentary text becomes even secondary, where ‘text’ consists of brief *sūtras*, condensed seminal form – the knowledge system may be remembered. E. g. *Tolkāppiyam*.

Commentaries have social function - it has power to establish “textual communities” – groups that define themselves by means of a specific interpretation of a canonical text or through exegetical practices and methods. This commentary context can

determine commentator's status among his peers. Commentary empowers the commentator and it also empowers the text commented upon and its author. It brings back the text from the exile of being written long ago and makes him a central culture authority one again by giving back the power that he is thought to deserve.

*Kallātam kaṛṛavarōṭu collātātē.* Do not mess up with someone who has learnt Kallātam. This is the proverb. It is a sophisticated and complex poem, a commentary on Tolkāppiyam.

### **19<sup>th</sup> century: Tamil literary culture.**

Printing press increased literacy, increased the distribution of the traditional texts, reached new audience with new type of information, encouraged new literary forms. Print facilitated public debates on everything from vernacular education to child marriage and nationalism. 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the process of systematic recovery of Cankam poetry. C. Vai. Tāmotaram Pillai (1832-1901), U.Ve. Cāmināthaiyar began to search for palm leaves manuscripts of ancient Tamil texts. The Tamils rediscovered their age-old heritage, cultural independence, their integrity and cultural independence, their separate nationhood.

Tamil becomes an instrument to fight the superiority of Sanskrit and the North Indian culture. The initial literary discovery becomes a socio-political sphere. The colonial powers and the missionaries took to Tamil studies. Study of Joseph Beschi and Ziegenbalg was revived by Ellis and others. There is a book to this effect by Thomas Trautmann, *The Madras School of Orientalism* (2006); Philological methods were introduced. Questions like – should the text be printed with the commentary or without Urai were discussed.

### **What constitutes a commentary?**

### **Why do we believe this to be a topic worthy of further inquiry?**

Every commentator inevitably wishes to explain the meaning of the commented-upon work: to reveal what appears hidden, to specify what is vague and to supply what is assumed; the outcome of this process is not always a straightforward gloss of the original text focused on basic semantics and syntax, but often a reflection of how the commentator believed the passage at hand fit within his own educational, religious, and cultural

background. Even the basic glosses usually follow a formulaic syntax and semantic specifications found in the ‘dictionaries’ of the time.



C. Vai. Tāmotaram Pillai

Secondly, we should not read these commentaries solely as instruments for retrieving the intention or the meaning that the author of the root text had in mind. This is important, it is true. But if we read commentaries only with this particular goal in mind, we will fail to learn what they can teach us about reading practices, methods of interpretation and what had importance for people at various points in time and space.

This attitude - that the originally intended -meaning should be the primary focus –has led at various times in indological scholarship to neglect the misplaced criticism of commentators. We may disagree with a particular explanation of a passage in a commentary. But we must understand what has been written and why.

Moreover, through understanding and studying these commentaries in their own right, we open up worlds of textual exegesis that inform us of how meaning and intention was established in the religious and literary communities that enjoyed, preserved and transmitted the root texts themselves. In that process of studying these texts, we can gain insight into cultural practices, mores, and the available or developing philological tools Commentators on Grammatical works.



## The Tamil Conception Of “Book” And Study

One of the essential features of Tamil literary culture, characteristic of and specific to the indigenous Tamil attitudes to literacy and scholarship, is the Tamil conception of “book” (*nūl*). (Cf. Kamil V. Zvelebil). It had appeared almost simultaneously with the beginnings of the erudite traditions as represented by the *Tolkāppiyam* (final redaction c. 450 A. D.), it was elaborated in subsequent commentaries beginning with Nakkīrar’s extended gloss on *Iraiyānār Kalavīyal* (c. 800 A.D., perhaps somewhat earlier), and it has reached its full-fledged accomplished shape in the *potuṭṭāyiram* or general introduction to Pavananti’s grammar *Nannūl* (lit. ‘The good book’, 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> cent. of the common era).

*Nannūl*, which has become the most frequently used standard grammar of literary Tamil, consists of three parts—the Preface or Introduction, *Eluttu*, which, roughly, corresponds to orthography and phonology, and *Col* which, roughly, deals with morphology and etymology. The two core sūtras concerning the notion and concept on *nūl* are aphorisms 24 and 25 of the General Introduction (*Potuṭṭāyiram*) to *Nannūl*. Aphorism 24 unfolds the comparison between thread (*nūl*) and book (*nūl*), and this drawn-out comparison legitimizes as it were the etymology of the word for ‘book’.

Although the art of writing was known, and a perfect system of script could and was employed both in monumental inscriptions and on palm leaves, the transmission of information, instruction in knowledge, and creation as well as reception of work of verbal art was almost exclusively performed in an oral exchange. Hence, the term *nūl*, unburdened with the association of a written or printed object, refers to ‘composition’, to ‘discourse’ (*panuval*) of ‘words’ (*col*) put together, ‘spun’ out according to certain structural and other rules which will be discussed presently.

The raw material of *nūl* are words (*col*) just as the raw material of thread (*nūl*) is cotton (*pañchu*): *pañc/ u itan col* says the first line stanza 24. The discourse (*panuval*) is an analog to the twisted yarn (*ilai*).

The following stanza (25) draws an analogy between a raw piece of timber and a ‘crooked’ (i.e . ignorant or prejudiced) human mind (*māntar manakkōttam*). As the

crookedness of a piece of timber is made straight by the application of carpenter's cord (nūl) so the 'crooked' mind is straightened by the application of nūl, a literary or erudite work.



All books (nūl) are of three kinds (*vakai*): primary or original (*mutal*), secondary or supplementary (*vali*), and derivative or supportive (*cārpū*) (s.5). Primary works (*mutanul*) are those which were 'seen' (*kantatu*), i.e conceived by the munaivan whose understanding (*arivu*) shines forth free from faults. The term munaivan may refer--- as it traditionally usually does---to the Primeval Being; however, it can also refer to the original author of unquestioned authority hallowed by ancient tradition (s.6). I do prefer the latter interpretation. Interpreted like this, I would translate the sixth aphorism,

“The primary work is that which has been conceived by the original author of brilliant knowledge free from errors.” Supplementary or secondary works (*Valinūl*) are such that follow the works of the original authors (*munnōr*) in their main conclusions, but can deviate or differ (*vikarṇam kūri* 'reveal differences'), if necessary (*vēntum*), taking care, however, to adhere strictly to *marāṇu*, i.e to established traditional usage.

The image here is of a 'path'(vali-nūl) leading from the solid base or beginning (*mutal*) developing the subjects and conclusions of the original (*mutal*). The third kind of *nul* is termed *cārpū*, lit. leaning on, supporting; in s. 8, it is termed *puṭainūl*, lit. side-work, lateral work. These 'books' are defined as such that follow, basically and at first, the data presented in the two other kinds of books (*iruvar nūl*), but at the same time disagree fundamentally as to some aspects.

After having stated that the fruit (i.e. benefit derived from ‘books’ (nūrpayan) consists of the attainment of virtue (*aram*), wealth (*porul*), pleasure (*inṭam*) and deliverance (vitu), Nannūl describes the seven objects to be aimed at by the author. It is worth noticing that the author is termed *ceṭṭavan*, lit. the one who speaks, who proclaims, who declares. Taken together with s.24 discussed and vāy ‘mouth’ of the author), this is a clear reference to the oral-aural nature of transmission, to the milieu of primary orality.

Most interesting are aphorisms 40-45 which deal in detail with the manner of study (kōtan marapu, lit. the [traditional] way of receiving). Kamil Zvelebil translates these aphorisms in full, as they throw light on the traditional methods of instruction in the oral milieu.

40: While describing the manner of study, the sages (pulavar) say [as follows]: coming in time, in respectful obedience [and] conformity with the teacher’s disposition, being attentive to [his] injunctions by word of mouth or sign to sit. to rise, to speak, to stop; thirsting for knowledge, with a love for learning; while receiving instructions to sit immobile like a statue, taking in the knowledge with ear and mind; listening carefully, retaining in memory all one has heard [and] going [home] when told to go.

41: (this aphorism describes nūl iyalpe ‘the method of studying the “book”’): To gain the knowledge of the valakku of nuval; to nourish’ the lessons; to reflects on what has been heard; to ask the teacher to explain difficulties ; to cultivate the acquaintance of well-educated persons; to ask; to answer questions; by the observance of these rules ignorance will vanish.

42: If he who has listened once has listened for a second time, [his knowledge] will increase [and] he will understand faultlessly.

43: If he has heard three times, he will master [the work] completely, [and] will be able to teach.

44: Though he has digested fully what the teacher had told, he will only have attained to one fourth (*kārkkūralatu*) [of the complete knowledge].

45: One fourth more is attained by associating with one’s fellow students, and the other half by teaching others, and by speaking [in public]; this bestows on one the greatness of

faultless scholarship (*mai aru pulamai māṇḍu*). (cf. Kamil V. Zvelebil, Companion Studies to the History of Tamil, 1992, pp. 226-234.)



### **Commentators on Tamil literature-** *Commentaries on theoretical treatises.*

There is an interesting article by Thomas Lehmann on classifying the classical commentaries. (French Institute Pondicherry, 2009). Commentary of Nakkiran on *Iraiyānar Akapporul* (kalaviyal) – the earliest in Tamil. (8<sup>th</sup> century). There were medieval commentators like Nakkrīrar (8<sup>th</sup> Cent.), Perācīriyar (13<sup>th</sup> Cent.) Naccinārkinīyar (14<sup>th</sup> Cent.), Cenāvaraiyar (13<sup>th</sup> Century), Ilampūranar (11<sup>th</sup> Century), Atiyārkunāllar and others. They were writing *Urai* to the *Nūl*. It is not clear when the word *mūlam* was introduced. Then there are also commentaries on literary works like *Tirukkural*, *Nālaṭiyār*, *Cilappatiakāram*, *Tirumurukārrupāṭai*.

### **Commentators on religious works – The Srivaishnava tradition.**

Rāmānuja (1017-1137) the most famous Sri Vaishnava leader, theologian, saint – born in Sriperumpatur, wrote in Sanskrit, but influenced by the bhakti hymns. His favoured disciple Pillān wrote a commentary on *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār, elevating the status of the Tamil text.

After about 200 years of Rāmānuja's death the Sri Vaishnava community split into two – vatakalai and tenkalai. Vatakalai emphasized the Sanskrit scriptures and salvation through traditional bhakti - devotion to the temple icons. Tenkalai emphasized the Tamil



scriptures (Tamil Vedas) and surrender to the Lord by his grace. These two theologies came to be known as ‘cat’ and ‘monkey’ theories of salvation. (Cf. The Jesuit-Dominican debate on the role of grace)

Vedānta Desika (Venkatanātha) was the leader of the Vatakalai; Pillai Lokācārya was the leader of the Tenkalai. Varavaramuni (Manavālamāmuni) is the well-known commentator on most of the works on Sri Vaishnava tradition.

### **Commentary tradition of the advaita. (Sanskrit)**

Here an example could be cited from the Sanskrit sources.

Bādarāyana wrote *Vedāntasūtras* (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Cent. AD) – a set of 555 aphorisms.

Śankara (8<sup>th</sup> cent. ) wrote his *Bhāṣya* on the sūtras.

Vācaspati Miśra (mid.9<sup>th</sup> cent.) wrote his *Bhāmati* on the Bhāṣya.

Amalānanda (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) – *Vedānta-kalpataru* (Commentary on Bhāmati).

Appayya Dīksita (16<sup>th</sup> cent.) – *Kalpataruparimala* (commentary on *Kalpataru*).

Ānandagiri (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) *Nyāyanirnaya*- commentary on the Bhāṣya).

Govindānanda(end of 16 cent.) *Bhāṣyaratnaprabhā* (commentary on the Bhāṣya)

Prakāśātman (13<sup>th</sup> cent.) – *Śārīrakanyāyasaṃgraha* ( a synthesis).

Why does one write a commentary? Vācaspati Miśra in his *Bhāmati* maps out the reason for it: “Just as falling into the current of the Ganges refreshes waters stagnant near the roadside, proximity to the work of the master refreshes the lowly words composed by ourselves and others.”

### **Commentary Tradition of the Srivaishnavas**

It is significant to note how the Tamil Vainava tradition brought in the commentary tradition almost parallel to the Sanskrit tradition.

Nammālvār (ca. 875 AD) wrote *Tiruvāymoli* (1102 stanzas);

Nāthamuni codified the works of the Ālvārs (*Nālāyira-dīnya-prabandham*).

Tirukurukai Pirān Pillān (begin. 12<sup>th</sup> cent.) wrote a commentary – *Ārāyirap-pati* (6,000 granthas); succinctly gives the theological import of each verse;

Nañciyar (1187-1287) wrote *Onpatināyirap-pati* (9,000 granthas); *polippurai* (a commentary which paraphrases a text or summarizes substance) focuses on paraphrasing the text or summarizing its gist;

Vādikesari Alakiyamanavāla Cīyar (15<sup>th</sup> cent.)- *Pannirāyirap-pati* (12,000). a *patavurai* (“word-for-word explanation) provides a word-for-word gloss;

Periyavāccān Pillai (1228-1322) – *Irupattunāyirap-pati* (24,000 granthas);

Vatakkū Theruvīti pīlai (1217-1312) *Muppattunāyirap-pati* (36,000 granthas); an *akala urai* (elaborate commentary) expands the content of the text, providing copious examples from various Sanskrit and Tamil sources.

While their size and means of elucidation may vary, the aim of all these commentaries is the same: the explication of Srivaishnava theological ideas.

### **Interpreting the Saiva legend of St. Nandan in 20<sup>th</sup> Century.**

#### **Nantanār of *Periyapurānam*.**

Retelling or interpreting Nantan story in Tamil Tradition down the centuries, is another form of hermeneutics. Sascha Ebeling (Chicago University USA, 2010) shows how the story of Nantan is interpreted according the socio political situation in Tamilnadu. People say this: A certain *purattiruttoṇṭan* known as ‘He who will go tomorrow’ and hailing from *Aṭaṇūr* benefited from the grace of Śiva Nāṭarāja in Chidambaram (Tillai). Giving up his lowly outcaste status, he became a sage (*muṇi*), and the three thousand brahmins traditionally said to dwell in Chidambaram worship. The term *purattiruttoṇṭan* literally means *puṛa-t-tiru-t-toṇṭan* ‘outside-holy-servant’, which scholars traditionally have taken to refer to being outside the social system, to untouchability. Hence, a *puṛa-t-tiruttoṇṭan* may be a revered devotee (saint) who is outside the four castes of the *varṇa* system.

Interestingly the saint is identified by his nickname, which suggests that his story of deferring his pilgrimage to Chidambaram day after day, saying ‘I will go tomorrow’, would have been known more widely than the name *Nantaṇ* we find in the *Periyapurānam*.

Perhaps Cekkilar even invented the name; we do not know this today. In any case, taken together Cuntarar's and Nampi's stanzas provide a nucleus of the Nālaippōvāṇ legend as we know it from the Periyapurāṇam, and they point to two important geographical locations, Tiruppunkūr and Ātanūr, both of which Cēkkilār had a lot to say about in his versio of the legend.

In the Periyapurāṇam, Nantaṇār's story is called Tiruṇālaippōvār nāyaṇār purāṇam, 'The history of the saint who will go tomorrow'. Since the Nantaṇār legend in the Periyapurāṇam is the first extended narrative treatment of the saint we know of, the 'original' Nantaṇār that later writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries refer to is the one depicted in the Periyapurāṇam.



### Retelling a story

Retelling a story is a way of writing a commentary. The author uses this story as a framework to convey his message according to the context of time and space. We shall see how Nantan has become in Tamil literature a vehicle of protecting establishment, a source of social protest and material for expressing one's dissent, thus rewriting history.

Driven by his great love for the Lord, Nantaṇ wishes to see (take darśan of) Shiva in Tiruppunkūr. But when he arrives there, he cannot enter the temple due to his untouchable status. While Nantaṇ stands outside the main entrance, Śiva's vehicle, the

bull, blocks his view. Lord Shiva commands the bull to move aside, and Nantaṇ can see him through the temple gateway.

Finally, he has his mind set on the temple in Cidambaram (Tillai). Again he puts it off: “I will go tomorrow”. But his ardent desire does not go away; it grows stronger day by day. Finally, he sets off.

When he arrives at the city limits of Cidambaram he sees the smoke rising from the gleaming sacrificial fires and the rows of monastic buildings and Vedic schools where the young brahmins learn to chant the Vedic hymns. All this frightens him, and he remembers his low caste status and realizes he can go no further. He walks around the city several times, and finally falls asleep, exhausted and disappointed, and aware that his low birth that causes distress is the obstacle to his happiness and salvation.

While Nantaṇār is sleeping, Lord Shiva understands the predicament in his grace and appears to him in a dream, smiling benevolently. “To be delivered from this birth, plunge into the fire, and come to me together with those who wear the threefold cord on their chests,” he orders Nantaṇār, and he also instructs the brahmins to prepare the fire the next day.

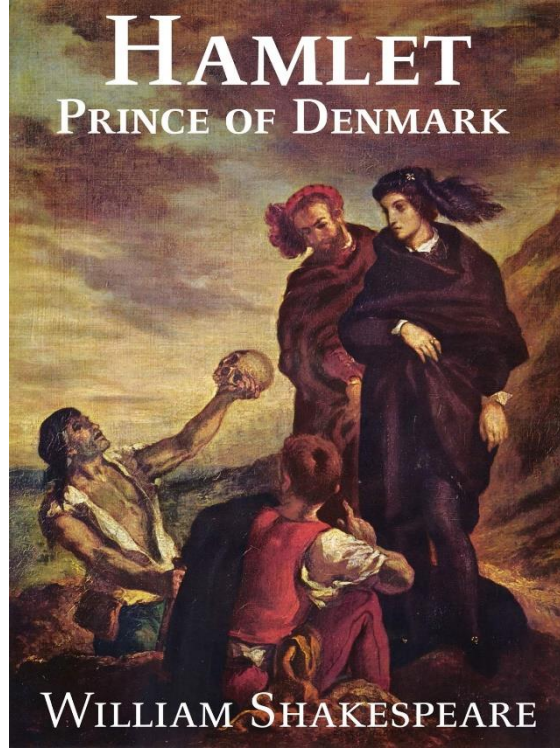
In accordance with Shiva’s command a fire pit is set up outside the temple in front of the main gateway. With hands raised in worship and his mind set on the anklets of the dancing Lord, Nantaṇ enters the flames and is rid of his false, deceptive (mortal) form. In the final stanza, Cekkilar sums up his story. By bathing in the fire, Nantaṇār gained release from his tainted body (mācu-uṭampu), and assuming the form of a spotless Vedic sage attained the feet of the dancing Lord.

This short summary of the legend points us to what seems to have been the central issue for Cekkilar: Nantaṇ’s transformation from a lowly, impure, tainted, polluted untouchable into a pure spotless, virtuous sage who is worshipped by the brahmin community in Cidambaram. And this process is more than a simple transformation.

It is a restitution, the righting of a wrong, the final regaining of a proper, real form of being. Cekkilar emphasizes throughout that Nantaṇ is utterly different from his fellow untouchables in the hamlet.



Later, we learn that, as an untouchable, Nantan̄ was trapped in the wrong body, in a “false, deceptive form”. The great virtuous ascetic, it turns out, was what lay hidden behind an ontological deception. It was Nantan̄’s real form, his real self.



To be restored to this real self again Nantan̄ had to enter a sacrificial fire in what is evidently an ancient Vedic fire ritual calculated to bring about transformation. Through this process he loses the blemish that has tainted him earlier, he is ‘purified’, converted from an impure untouchable to a pure brahmin sage. Thus, while Nantan̄ is portrayed from the beginning as both humble and submissive (following his caste dharma) as well as spiritually accomplished, it is only through the final process of ‘purification’ that he can regain his former, his true self.

Describing him as “incomparable” (oppu-il), then, is not an empty epithet of adornment. For Cekkilar, Nantan̄ was really a brahmin in disguise, or – even if he was not a sage to begin with– he was at least not a ‘typical’ untouchable. He was special, peerless, an exception to the rule, and therefore his story represents a particular unique case.

If Nantan̄ was indeed special, then his story does not suggest the possibility of temple entry, and hence of upward mobility, for all untouchables. In other words, if Nantan̄

was a brahmin in disguise, the story of Nantaṇār poses no threat to the order of things in the Chola realm with brahmins at the top of the spiritual (and political) hierarchy and untouchables outside the fold of brahmanical Hinduism. (cf. Sascha Ebeling, *Another Tomorrow for Nantanar*, 2010. It is a brilliant study of Nantan legend and here it is only summarized from his work.)

### **Socio-political context**

Making sure that Nantaṇ's behaviour would not be interpreted as contesting the Chola social order, Cekkilar took great care to contain it, to keep it within the limits of caste *dharma*. Moreover, even though Nantaṇ was exemplary in his duty and devotion, he still had to be 'burned' to achieve his goal. The significance of this fire ordeal should not be underestimated. Those who desire to follow in Nantaṇār's footsteps would have to face the same ordeal, an ordeal that entails—beyond all literary symbolism—the 'burning' of a human being. The fire ritual is thus effectively geared towards scaring off imitators, in case any other paraiyaṇ should think that Nantaṇ's story was indeed repeatable. The immense cruelty of Nantaṇ's immolation has often been explained away as merely symbolic. Gandhi's comment provides a case in point:

### **Gandhi's comment provokes further thinking**

"I hope that no one will advance the argument that Nanda had entered fire [to prove the purity of his character], and that Antyajās are welcome to do what he did and then enter temples. The story of his going through fire is pure poetry." (Gandhi) Why should only his immolation be 'poetry', i.e. fiction or fantasy, and the other elements of the story true? Gandhi clearly twists the story so as to fit it to his own ideological agenda of providing a "sanctifying", an uplifting story during his campaign for Dalit rights in the 1920s.

### ***Nantanar carittiram* by Gopālakrishna Pāratiyaṇ**

While the story's ending remained the same as in the Periyapurāṇam, Kōpālakrishṇa Pāratiyaṇ achieved a dramatically new vision of Nantaṇ. In his Nantaṇār carittiram, he managed to turn the Nantaṇ of the Periyapurāṇam, who served to underwrite the Chola social order, into his exact opposite: a rebel, a symbol of subaltern resistance, a voice against the oppression of the low castes by the brahmins. This re-contextualisation or re-historicisation of Nantaṇ's story is predicated upon reading between the lines of the medieval legend, upon its 'deconstruction'.

Writing centuries later, Pāratiyār was able to strip the legend of Cēkkilār's original religio-political agenda of propagating Shaivism while at the same time praising the Chola monarch and validating his social order. Inserting Nantaṇ into his contemporary colonial context, Kopakrishṇa Pāratiyār unleashed the potential for dissidence in the medieval Nantaṇ. It is the rebel Nantaṇār, the powerful symbol of subaltern resistance, who is today firmly anchored in the cultural memory of the Tamils.



### Re-telling a legend is also critiquing

Paratiyar's work, may also be read at another level. It has been suggested that the Nantaṇār carittiram may be viewed as a general, if veiled, critique of the exploitation of India by the colonial authorities. One may see in the brahmins' hegemony as represented by the vētiyar the machinations of the British colonisers, and in the plight of the paraiyar the situation of the colonial subjects. Reading the Nantaṇār carittiram as an allegory of empire is compelling, especially since Pāratiyār shifts emphasis in Nantaṇ's story in order to critique contemporary agricultural exploitation.

Pāratiyār shifts emphasis in Nantaṇ's story in order to critique contemporary agricultural exploitation. Kopalakirūṣṇa Paratiyar's 'hagiographers' emphasize his devotion and exemplary vision, it appears as if his Nantaṇār carittiram was driven more by religious than political concerns. But depicting Paratiyar primarily as a pious Shaivite, largely unconcerned with his own society, obfuscates how radical his work really was in his time. At least the majority of twentieth-century writers have recognized the obvious socio-political resonances of his work.

### ‘The New Nantan’ (*Putiya Nantan*) by Putumaippittan

‘The New Nantan’ was first published in the avant-garde literary magazine *Manikkoti* in 1934 (July 22). This is how the story begins: “Many years passed by since the untouchable, Nandan, was purified in the fires of Chidambaram, and turned into a Saivite saint, a Nayanar. Overcome with pride because of this event, Ādanur sank into a sea of bliss—or sorrow, was it?—and forgot everything. It didn’t even know about the establishment of the British Empire. Such was its profound sleep.

Now, a number of new signs appeared in Ādanur—a railway station, a stall for betel leaves and nuts, calling itself a Shop, and a cafe, known as Hotel. Nobody knew how these matters came about. After Nandan said goodbye and left though, there was no salvation in store for the rest of the paraicheri, the untouchables’ settlement. It remained the old street of the untouchables. The story thus fast-forwards us to the late colonial period, the 1930s, when Putumaippittan was writing. What had changed amidst Ātanūr’s slumber, the narrator tells us, was that the paraiyars were now slaves not only of the priest who leased out the land, but also of the white colonial masters (veḷḷait turaikaḷ).



Putumaippittan

The ending of the story is highly dramatic. Gandhi is scheduled to stop briefly in the village on his tour through the country. Everyone is eager to see the Mahatma, and Karuppan, too, walks to the station to ‘see’ him, even though he is blind. He does not realize that he is walking on the railway tracks, and when the Madras Mail—supposed to



bring the Mahatma to the village—speeds through the station without stopping, Karuppan is killed and so are his son and Ramanatan who had rushed to rescue him.

“Three people’s blood mingled that day. It continues to mingle. Which of them can we call a Nandan? Two of them saw a new light. Saw it in two different ways. Will they be at peace, at least after their death? They were sacrificed to society. But who thinks of that? There were big headlines and long columns in the newspapers. But in Adanur? “Through his reworking of the Nantanar legend, Putumaippittan provides us with a powerful and highly complex critique of his own times. In his perceptive analysis of the story, M. Uttirapati demonstrates its political momentum.

Putumaippittan also sets up a sharp contrast between the urban, metropolitan rhetoric of progress and development and the backwardness of the rural areas. The newspapers report the tragic accident of Karuppan, his son and Ramanatan with “big headlines and long columns”, but what about Ātanūr? Again, their death is a lost opportunity for social change. Separated in life due to caste prejudices, they are united in death when their blood mingles.

But even death brings no solution, cannot turn political rhetoric into reality or theory into practice: “They were sacrificed to society. But who thinks of that?” For Putumaippittan, writing four generations after Kopalakrishna Paratiyar there was not much hope that things would change—at least not in Ātanūr.

### **New Avatars of Nantan**

In 1947, the famous comedian Kalaiñar En. Es. Krishnan performed his Kintan Carittiram. In 1969, the Sri Lankan author Irāmuppillai Murukaiyan (b. 1935) published his theatre play Kōpuravācal (“The Entranc to the Temple Gateway”) in Colombo. In 1978, the critic and writer Indira Parthasarathy (Intirā Pārttacārati, b. 1930) published his play Nantan Katai, translated into English in 2003 by C. T. Indra as The Legend of Nandan.

Parthasarathy’s play Nantan Katai “shifts the story from the realm of religion to that of culture” through an overall ‘aestheticisation’ of Nantan’s character. His devotion manifests itself in a profound and abstract love of beauty. His philosophical appreciation and intellectual finesse are contrasted with both the squalor of the paraiyar quarters and the moral dilapidation of brahmins and other upper-caste Hindus. The play opens with

Nantan's meditation on beauty when he remembers the entrancing dance of a female temple dancer-cum-prostitute (devadāsī) at Tiruppunkūr:

Udaiyar: The Lord is beautiful, one can again and again worship him. What is the purpose of human birth? To worship beauty. And what is beauty? That woman, her dance, the deity she worships ... all that ... the God of the Brahmins is the quintessence of beauty.

Mudaliyar: What a wonder! Nandanaar and Abhirami have become fused with the ether of Thillai [Chidambaram]! They have become fused with the ether of Thillai! Om Namasivāya Namaha.

Udaiyar: Who can understand the Lord's play?

Mudaliyar: Are there any more paraiyans who want to become brahmins? ... Come, come! If you take a dip in the fire ...

Nantan repeatedly expresses is viewed in strikingly philosophical terms, for instance, in his first conversation with Apirāmi:

Nandan: It's your beauty that has made me speak.

Woman: My body?

Nandan: Beauty is not in the body but lies in the mind of those who experience it.

Woman: You speak eloquently...



For Parthasarathy, the ill-treated, ill-appreciated are not only the paraiyar, but also women and, last but not least, artists. In a world where minds are not capable of seeing and appreciating beauty, we also miss the specific capacity of perception, of refinement, that leads to a developed moral judgment. Nantan has a moral capacity, the refinement it

takes to recognize something beautiful as something good or morally appropriate and vice versa. Art is close to life, close to how one should live.

Nantaṇ's story points us to the pivotal role of the artist in society as one who develops and re-imagines, who contests and validates moral positions. The ending of The Legend of Nandan, then, too is telling. In a world where beauty is not appreciated, the artist must die. A world where beauty is not appreciated is world without morals.

Indira Parthasarathy was not the last author to re-imagine Nantaṇār. The musician T. Pālacuppiramaṇiyam was touring through Ramanathapuram District with his group performing Nantaṇ's story in a traditional folk genre called villuppāṭṭu ('bow song'). This *Nantaṇār āṛāyccikē katai* was written by Em. Ci. Jeyappirakācam, broadcast on Trichy Radio in September 1972 and printed as a book in February 1984. In August 1982, the poet Tamilanpaṇi (b. 1933) published his poem '*Anta nantaṇai ericca neruppiṇ miccam*' ('What is left of the fire that burned Nantaṇ') in a collection of poems with the same title.



In August 1988, Vili. Pa. Itayavēntaṇ (alias Pa. Aṇṇāturay) published his short story '*Nantaṇār teru*' ('Nantaṇār Street') in the magazine *Maṇa ōcai*, and later included it as the title story in a collection of his short stories. To these we may add Yamuṇā Muttaiya's katakalātceṇam titled *Nantaṇār puraṭci* ('Nantaṇār's Revolution') and Ṭi. Celvarācu's stage play Nantaṇ both mentioned in Uttirāpati without further details (1989: 2). During her

fieldwork in 1984/85, the anthropologist Lynn Vincentnathan collected different oral versions of the Nantaṇār legend by caste Hindus and Dalits in order to study psychological and social aspects of cultural beliefs in support of untouchability.

She argues that in the caste Hindu versions, Nantaṇ is viewed as not really “representative of all untouchables or even of their characteristics or potentials”, by claiming, for instance, that he is actually a brahmin who regains his real status as a sage through the fire purification. According to Vincentnathan such narrative strategies serve to uphold the caste Hindus’ “cultural knowledge about higher caste superiority and untouchable inferiority”, while in the Dalit narratives Nantaṇār “goes beyond a role model and serves more as an example or proof of untouchables’ generally high capability”.

### Conclusion

In the hands of different authors, Nantanar became a different saint embodying different messages as the times were changing. Ultimately, what mattered to those who retold Nantaṇ’s story was one quality of his: his particular status outside of society, his untouchability, which is a characteristic that could go a long way in being redeployed for new ideological agendas.

While Cekkilar’s Nantanar was tailored not to upset the Chola state of affairs, it was Kopalakrishna Pārati who first recognized and unchained the subversive potential of the story. Henceforth, all later re-workings have had to locate themselves between these two poles of order and contestation. And this is perhaps what really made Nantaṇār a saint: his versatility, the adaptability of the politico- theological ‘message’ he teaches us to fit new times and environments.

Or might one perhaps say that it is the same old message over and over again in different garbs: the impossibility of those marginalized within their own society of ever finding justice? A saint might then be someone who continues to show us a simple, fundamental truth—time after time.

This is a classical example of hermeneutics in Tamil tradition and with this we could conclude this article, though many more things could be said about Tamil hermeneutics – perhaps in the subsequent studies.





# Tamil Siddhars - Revolutionaries or Rebels?



## Dr. Moses Michael Faraday

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Both in the Tamil Literary World and in the Tamil Religious World, the word ‘Siddhars’ is a catchy magic word, we can say. People are so fascinated to know more about them, either about their revolutionary ideas or about their yogic or tantric powers. Of late, atleast from the last century, numerous books have been written and researches have been undertaken on Siddhars and their literature. This trend still continuous in both the Literary World and Religious World of the Tamils.

At the very outset of this study, one important fact we should never fail to take note. That is, mainly because of the proliferation of books and other materials on Siddhars, they have given room for lot of misconceptions and lack of clarity in understanding and assessing the Siddha movement. This brief study is a small attempt to clear the air about the way the Siddhars to be identified. To achieve this purpose, let us see some general introductory ideas about Siddhars.

**Who are Siddhars?** First of all, we should understand that Tamil Siddhar’s are multifaceted people and we can get clear understanding of them only through their literature. All the so called ‘Superstitious’ and unscientific beliefs about them cannot be put into any logical assessment like believing that they live beyond time and thousands of years

of their life or their supernatural abilities called ‘Siddhus’ to change their bodies or places of existence etc., etc., These extraordinary powers and acts should be left for individual’s belief and acceptance.

However, going by the vast amount of the literatures that are available in their name, we come to some conclusions about them. Even at this front also, we have the difficulty of defining the ‘genuine’ text as there are lot of interpolations and alterations in them. Though most of the Siddhars’ age may not be earlier than like 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., the unavailability of printing and use of palm leaf manuscripts etc., make it difficult to identify genuine or original text.

**Cardinal ideologies or principles of Siddhas:** Anyway going by the available collections of Siddhars’ poems or songs, we can easily classify their themes of mission or study under five headings, as for me. They are:

**(i) Medicine:** Most of the content of Siddhar’s poems, would be about the medicines, they offered to the society, which they prepare from plants, leaves, roots and also from various metals, etc. But, these poems may look simple in their language outwardly, but only those trained in them by a ‘Guru’ (Teacher) can make out the true meaning of them. This nature of their poems is called “deceptive simplicity” by the scholars.

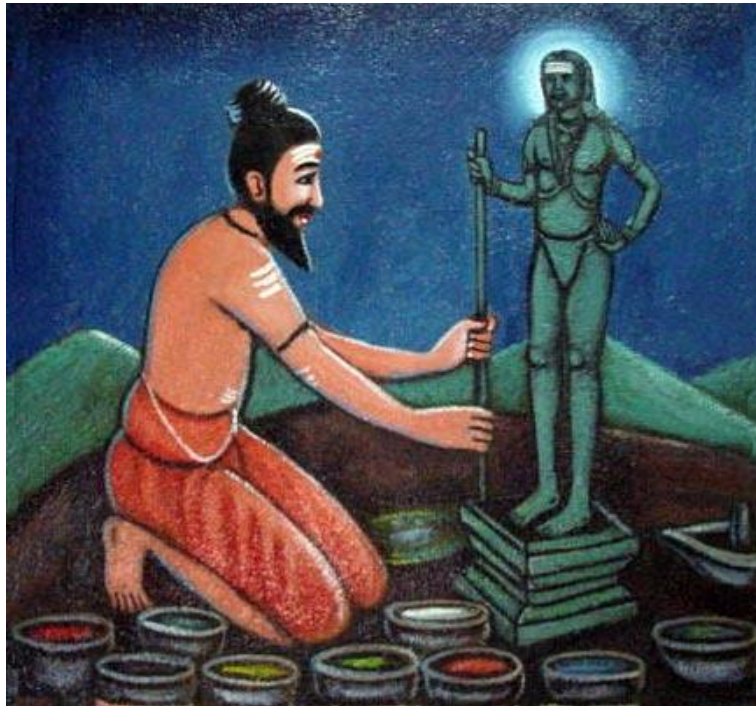
**(ii) Yogam:** It is common knowledge, that Siddhars’ practiced and promoted a yoga system called ‘Kundalini’ yogam, though there are other variations like ‘Vasi Yogam’ and ‘Pariyanga Yogam’ etc., Whatever said about their poems on ‘medicines’ will apply for this too. Major chunk of their poems deal about ‘yoga’ after ‘medicine’.

**(iii) Alchemy:** Another, favourite theme of Siddhas is ‘Alchemy’. This concerns various metals like Gold, Iron, Mercury, etc., and how to convert one into other. The researcher called “GUNA” calls it ‘indigenous experiments of chemistry’ which make Siddhas great native scientists’. This subject also takes the next major portion of their poems.

**(iv) Wisdom:** Under this title, we can group all the poems and thoughts of Siddhars about True Religion, life of love, the right way to worship God and reach heaven (‘veedu’).

Though these kinds of poems may be little less in number compared to the ones on medicine and yoga, only these poems give the main identity for Siddhars. That is why ‘Siddhars’ poems’ collections are called ‘collection or compendium of wisdom’ (Gnanak Kovai or Gnana Sastra Thirattu). Pattinathar, Pambattiyar, Sivavakkiyar and Kaduveliyar are the significant ones who wrote these kinds of poems.

**(v) Reformation:** The fiery and vehement condemnations of Siddhars on castism, idol worship, false priesthood, false religious practices, and all other false scriptures, fraudulent activities of religious leaders may be grouped under this title. Siddhars are mainly identified as revolutionary voices against all kinds of social evils and oppressions because of these kind of poems only. Sivavakkiyar, Agasthiyar, Pambattiyar, Kudambai Chittar, Bogar are some of the prominent ones who wrote these kinds of vehement expressions.



**Other themes:** There may be other themes which could be seen in the poems or songs of Siddhars like renunciation of bodily pleasures, the meanness and impermanence (Nilayamai) of human body and women etc., etc., However, these themes are few and these can be grouped into the above said five headings. Also in the name of some very late siddhars (19<sup>th</sup> century AD or later) some poems are available which talk about some black magic practices and other astrology oriented themes. True scholars don't approve

these ones as classic Siddha literature. At this juncture, one important information should be shared for clarification. In Siddhar's poems or songs, all these five subjects, cannot be segregated or identified in different poems. They will be mixed and mingled in the flow of their works. It is a stupendous task to segregate them from the works of one Siddhar, as all Siddhars' talk about all these, which would be intertwined in their poems. Like the familiar idiom about the peculiar bird 'Swan' drinking only milk out of water, the scholar should segregate these themes. Any way this would serve as a general introduction about the themes of Siddhars' songs.

**How they become revolutionaries:** We all know that Siddhars' poems are very sharp and poignant in their expressions and condemnations against the evils like castisem and other oppressions prevalent in our society some times in the name of God and Religion. C.H. Jesudassen calls them rightly 'as a remarkable group of free Thinkers' in his book 'History of Tamil Literature'<sup>1</sup>. We can cite numerous examples for this from their works. Only these expressions and the boldness behind them make them '**Revolutionaries**' in the Literary and Religious worlds of Tamils. But, we can also call them as '**Rebels**' because of the severity of their attacks against social evils. A revolutionary would attempt to bring about changes in the society through strong, radical ideas but may be in a gradual and gentle way. But, the rebels would try to achieve their goals in more strong and wild approach, making it a forceful people movement. Tamil Siddhars' way of expression of their reformatory ideas show them in that light not only to a common reader but also to intelligent researchers. We will see some few examples for their wild expressions and some of the researcher's portrayals of them, one after another in the following paras and close this brief study.

### **I) Forceful expressions and vehement voices of Siddhars that show them as Rebels:**

**a) Against Casteism:** Almost all reformers speak against casteism. But the vehement way, Siddhars attack them show them as rebels. For examples, Pambattiyar says 'we should set fire to caste divisions'<sup>2</sup>. Sivavakkiyar questions 'where is caste division in human birth' and tries to give lot of scientific and allegorical explanations to prove there is no difference in the human race<sup>3</sup>.



**b) Against idol worship:** So many Siddhars talk vehemently against idol worship. For example, Pampattiyar in his poem starting ‘Uliyitta Karchilaiyil’<sup>4</sup> calls idol worshippers as fools and their ignorance would never depart them. Kudambai Chittar even names some of the deities and the idols like monkey, eagle and the stone and metal idols and ridicules them openly<sup>5</sup>. Sivavakkiyar even asks the idol worshippers that how come you worship one part of the stone and another part stample under your feet as your house entrance stone<sup>6</sup>. Agasthiar is more wild in his poem ‘vaaduvar namamendrum’ as he says only fools who do not know the perfect God will worship these idols and bark like dogs and die<sup>7</sup>.

**c) Against temple worship:** Many Siddhars are not only against idol worship, but also against Temple worship. It is a familiar song of the Sivavakkiyar which begins as ‘Koyilavathu Aethada’<sup>8</sup>. In this he calls Temple worshippers as Ignorants’ (Kulamarae). Kaduveli Chittar and Kudambai Chittar says that by visiting many temples, you would only torment your body but will not get any fruitful reward. Better see God in your own body and mind<sup>9</sup>. It is interesting Pambattiyar and Kudambiyar both use the word ‘Kaal Kadukka’ and ‘Kaal Nova’ (to the pain of your legs) while talk about so called pilgrimage to temples<sup>10</sup>. Kudambiyar uses the names of holy towns like Kasi, Rameswaram to deride them<sup>11</sup>.



**d) Against worshipping multi gods (Polytheism):** Many Siddhars forcefully condemn the belief of polytheism too. In fact, Agasthiyar in his poems even mentions many deities like, Bagirathi, Kalaimagal, Paarvathy, Arumugam and says they are intolerable for worship and not the habitats of true God (Sivan)<sup>12</sup>, Bogar in his work ‘Satta Kandam Ezhayiram’ mentions many Gods’ name like Krishnan, Ganapathy, Subramaniyar,



Vadivelan and tells that they are only human beings and not gods<sup>13</sup>. Kudambiyar appeals to people to identify false Gods to worship the only true God<sup>14</sup>.

**e) Against false scriptures and priests:** Siddhars works condemning false scriptures and false priests are so much in number. Specially Agasthiyar talks vehemently against these so called ‘vaedas’ and ‘sastras’ are made only to make a living by the false priests, in his poem, ‘Thayangamal pizhaippatharkae indha gnanam’<sup>15</sup>. They even deride the four vaedas openly using the name ‘Sadhur vaedam’, etc., One Siddhar calls all sastras ‘rubbish’<sup>16</sup>.

We can go on citing examples for this kind of open attacks of Siddhars on the present religious practices and beliefs.

## **II) Comments and descriptions of scholars on Siddhar’s revolutionary ideas and expressions:**

Now, let us see the comments and descriptions of some of the prominent Siddha literature scholars and writers on Siddhar’s revolutionary ideas and expressions.

### **i) A.V. Subramaniya Ayer**

“Today it is not much necessary to be so bold to speak against casteism and the religious worship forms. But, to speak or sing against these in the days of Siddhars, limitless courage is needed. The achievement of Siddhars is no mean task”<sup>17</sup>.

### **ii) Kamil V. Zvelabil on Sivavakkiyar’s works**

“He is a great rebel against the Hindu religious system, particularly the Brahminic domination. He opposes vedic and Agama authorities and resists Brahmins. He condemns idol worship and temple rituals. He is number one enemy of caste system.

He opposes any kind of ritualistic practices. He refuses Saiva - Vaishnava Divisions. This rebel who was against vedic rituals and practices was denounced by the recognized religious order. His poems were not included in the saivaite devotional literature called ‘Thirumurai’<sup>18</sup>.

iii) **V. Chidambara Ramalingam Pillai**

“The Siddha Literature which could not enter into the saivaite literary history so far, now taken the prime place in it”<sup>19</sup>.



V. Chidambara Ramalingam Pillai

iv) **Ma. Sambasivam Pillai**

“Those saivaites who follow the ways taught by the Saivaite saints who founded and promoted the saiva religion, would they consent to consider Siddhar literature? Never”<sup>20</sup>.

v) **Ooran Adigal**

“There is much difference between Siddhantha Saivism and Siddhars’ saivism. In Thirumantiram, some ideas not acceptable for Siddhantha saivism are there, say the scholars. Though not many, atleast few would know that today’s siddhantha scholars who take Thaevaram and Thiruvagasam as cardinal books, would not take.

Thirumanthiram at that level. There are some siddhantha scholars, who would not even agree with Thayumanavar. Dry siddhantham has taken hold of them to that extent”<sup>21</sup>.

vi) **K.C. Veeraragava Iyar**

‘Most of the Siddhars seem to be opposing and rejecting the monistic philosophy of Sankarar and the idol worship of Hindus’<sup>22</sup>.

vii) **S. Madasamy**

‘There are lot of evidences both in the history and literature for the enmity between the saivaites and Siddhars which make them two different poles apart. Though we may brush this enmity aside saying that this could have arisen due to some other non-religious reasons, one main contradiction prevents us from considering Siddhars as saivaites. Saivaite religion is called ‘Temple Religion’ as it gives prominent place to temple and temple worship. How can we keep Siddhars, inside this ‘Temple Religion’ who denounced temple as ‘Kovilavathu Aethada’ and idol worship as ‘nattakallum paesumo’<sup>23</sup>.

Another researcher **Dr.M. Deivanayagam** in his Ph.D. Thesis ‘A comparative study between Thirukkural, Saiva Siddhantam and Bible’ talks about the revolt called ‘Kugai Idi Kalagam’ which happened in the days of later Chola Kings, in which Siddhars were chased to jungles and beaten by religious priests and others, because of their rebellious songs and poems<sup>24</sup>.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, there are numerous evidences and examples available both inside the Siddha literature and in the commentaries and studies on them for the forceful and fiery way the Siddhars expressed their views and principles against the established religion and its practices and proponents. Hence, it leads us to the easy conclusion that Tamil Siddhars cannot be described as revolutionaries alone, but they move to the next level of rebels by their wealth of literary works and the language and force they used in them.



## Life is a Fitness journey



**Krithika Gokulnath**



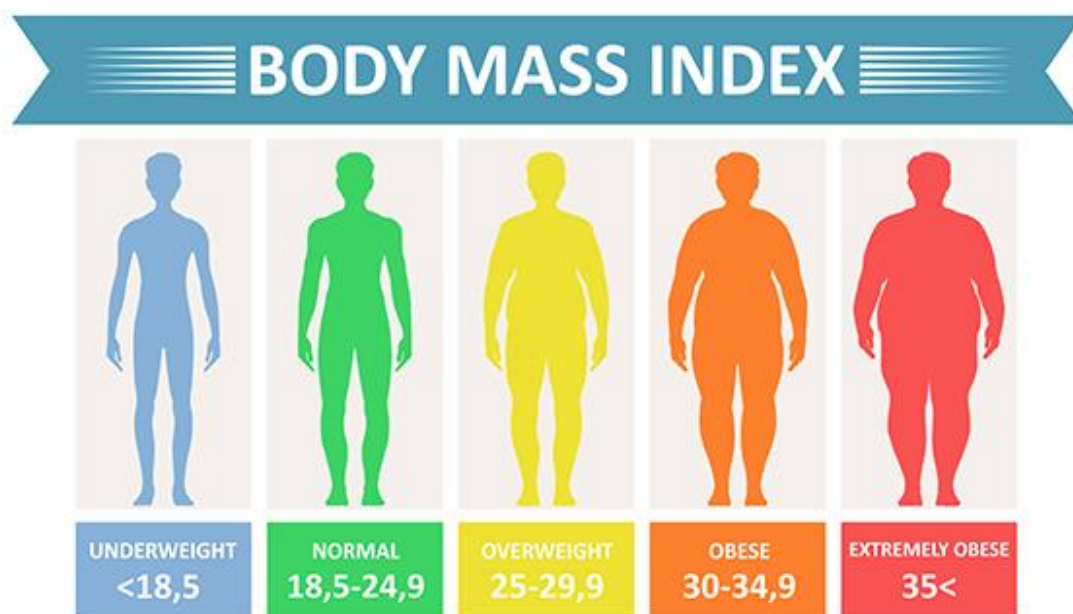
“Survival of the fittest”, is something we have heard since school days. When we say “fit”, we need to consider the term cautiously.

Qualification and fitness are two terms I urge you to consider. While we associate qualification as a term that helps us get associated or categorised as one that can join a herd, fitness would be a term that would brand us. In an interview thus, we invite those who qualify to our requirements and choose one who fits.

Since I have brought the example of fitness to a situation, I urge you to next think about the larger picture, survival. Tamils have always looked far beyond the immediate. We might make ourselves fit enough for employment, fit enough for a relationship, fit enough to pass the baton on to someone else. But our ancestors have taught us how to stay “Naturally Selected” and keep our gene pool superior.

When we think about Physical fitness, we often have scales, like Basal metabolic rate, or height weight ratio (Body mass index) or biochemical markers or physically activity scores that are age and heart rate based, or age and corresponding developmental milestone-based. In today's modern world, we have access to the world's averages for everything and what most people test to make sure of is if they are fit to be in the herd, which is assumed to be 'Normal', or they would be categorised 'abnormal'.

If we think of height, they might categorise a person who is below 4 ft of height at age 18 as one with stunted growth, less than average. Someone who weighs 70 Kgs at 15 years of age would be categorised as overweight, above average. Someone whose biochemical markers are not normal are given supplements or drugs, to keep everyone under one umbrella of Normal people.



Let us stop and for a day sit and list out activities and habits that were part of our culture. Analyse if they were in anyway better than today's methods and then take a decision. As much as it is important to embrace technology and change, it is not bad to keep something that is a well thought out strategy from ancient times. We need to differentiate practices and habits that are superficial and are narrow in their intentions. We needn't accept everything that is traditional or modern just because it seems fancy. Let me list a few of our practices, habits, or believes that we can analyse in terms of their relevance in the Digital age.



Our cultural practices are completely in synchrony with the circadian rhythm. In other words, our states of sleep and wakefulness are in sync with the Solar day. This is something all living things do. This is something that kept mankind alive since the first human came to exist. So, this is something we needn't question, right? Scientific reasoning is valid as long as the questions are What, How and Why. Questions such as 'What-if' , 'Why not' have led to modern day Biotechnology and Genetic engineering. Some of the scientific inquiry has also been done with the arrogant 'so what'. Therefore let us reason a 'Why not' follow the traditional ways of Natural Selection and then compare them with our intellectual interpretations.

Let us discuss fitness markers under three categories: habits and routine that are beneficial to stay healthy, exercise or physical activity levels, mental health and training the brain.

### Habits and Routines

Most animals and plants have their physiological activities aligned with the rising and setting of the Sun. Science has understood what happens to the levels of various hormones through the day and night and agree with the association of health with circadian coordination of our activities.

Our ancestors slept early and woke up early too. Thus 7-8 hours of sleep was guaranteed. Sleep is understood today as the main activity that helps in repair and restoration.(1) The hormone melatonin mediates repair. (2) This hormone is also known to be aligned with the Circadian clock. It gets secreted only hours after sunset. And it fades away 2 hours after sunrise. This habit of sleeping when the sun goes down and waking after sunrise is unquestionably a good healthy habit that need not be subjected to 'what-if' analysis.

Our ancestors did not eat a huge breakfast. What was consumed was a porridge, which was millet and lentil based. We have from some sources misunderstood the quantity of food required by our body . Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a normal man and dinner like a pauper. This doesn't seem to be scientifically accurate. Breakfast needn't be heavy. It is best to keep breakfast protein and fibre rich. (3) Lunch is the only meal that can be heavy. Exactly as our ancestors practiced. They were people who did physically exhaustive work too. So the complex carbohydrates they ate for breakfast broke down slowly and kept them

satiated till lunch. Sugary foods or snacks were never part of daily diet in our ancient times. Jaggery or palm sugar was used and even these were not part of the diet everyday. Deep fried snacks were made for festivals and stored for a week, not more. Refrigeration wasn't required since they consumed freshly grown vegetables and freshly milked milk. The milk was curdled in the night and thus refrigeration wasn't required. There was no reheating of the previous day's food. Food was cooked and eaten freshly each day. These are the habits that are being advised by nutritional experts today.

Hygiene was taught in rhymes that have been handed down for ages, the Aathichudi and kondrai vendhan have been etched into our system. Kandhal aanalum kasakki kattu, koozh aanalum kuLithu kudi etc were hygiene advice. Practices such as leaving our footwear out side the house, entering the house after washing our legs, eating with our hands, sleeping on a straw mat, leading a chemical free, zero waste lifestyle are slowly being understood as reasons for longevity.

### Physical Fitness

Our ancestors did not depend on machines. The machines were invented to help us reduce human effort and save time. But save time for what? There were physical activities that were indirect physical exercises. Today, though these might seem out of fashion, actually trying them out would convince us that it is a myth. For example, using a traditional tool to grind something might seem time consuming. But it would combine an arm workout combined with core strengthening without the expenditure of electricity or gym subscription. This might be impractical for people living in multi storey apartments. However the intention is to help us recall some homebound activities that were exercises. Fetching water from the well, squatting to wash clothes or utensils, grinding batter using stone grinders, pounding using the traditional tools, drawing Kolams in the morning, sweeping, mopping floors, walking, instead of relying on fuel powered vehicles etc did not actually consume as much time as we exaggeratedly imagine. Since work was shared between members of the family. Today most of the productive hours are lost on social media.

Physical activity and fitness levels were judged occasionally in events like Jallikattu, where a man's adrenaline rush kept him young and energetic and was also one occasion for spouse selection. It is scientifically proven that adrenaline keeps the heart healthy.

The 'Ilavattakkal', a boulder of up to weight from 100-1000 Kg, was used to train and prove physical strength. Men intending to marry and start their sex life officially, participated in these displays of strength. The boulders had to be lifted off the ground and thrown over one's shoulders. This involves strength in the arms, the core and chest. The Karalakkattai is another muscle training equipment that has been used for ages. In fact modern fitness experts also vouch for the effectiveness of these traditional Clubs. Core muscle strength (the muscles of the abdomen, sides, and the back) has been associated with sexual health.

(4)

### **Fitness of the mind.**

Whenever we discuss fitness, the mind cannot be ignored. A healthy body would yield a healthy mind. A healthy mind is one that is alert and positive. Modern day psychology suggests positive reiteration, confidence, courage etc. These were indirectly part of our cultural practices. The moral values of Tamils has been thought through and includes rules and tricks of community living.



We have always interacted with neighbours. What we ridicule as gossip has been vent out of emotions, which sometimes have been helped with easy solutions from experienced elders. Humans are social animals and so we seek validation for our actions constantly from society. Unlike today's 'virtually connected' but actually lonely millennials, the traditional society had been less complicated. We had cousins who told us reality without decorations.

We had uncles who corrected us in private without hesitation. We were guided by our grandparents. We were never praised directly. So our egos were never huge. Even today we find that our grandparents are content. They never update a perfectly working gadget. They never change something about the interior of the house because of societal pressure or to impress someone. We had a perfect understanding of what matters and were not victims of materials.

We have given to and taken from society. We have had customs where communities came together to fund events. For example, the concept of gifting money as 'moi', something that is still followed is an indirect invisible loan that would help someone manage expenses

To summarise, our Tamil as society has various practices that have helped us stay healthy and fit. Let us use our discretion and continue those that need no change. Let us not get influenced by some modern practice which might actually be ours but just wrapped and repurposed without our knowledge.

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5. Aathichudi. Avvaiyar

6. Kondrai Vendhan, Avvaiyar



## Aranyani, Chapter - 5



### Vijeni

1432, Thai Maatham, Paridhāvi Aandu  
Arava Kingdom  
Athikoodoor



1439, Aani Maatham, Siddhārthi Aandu  
Arava Kingdom  
Athikoodoor

As the sun came up with beautiful colours, the queen of Arava, returned to the chamber after her ablutions. She walked in the lead, with four of her personal assistants following close behind.

One among them was the newly joined sixteen-year-old girl, Mangala. After entering the chamber, she glanced around at the walls and high ceiling. “Listen, listen,” she whispered at another assistant, gazing at the carvings of grapevine and embedded precious gems. “How come only this chamber looks so royal in the entire palace?”

“What is it, Mangala?” Badhrakumari turned away from the polished mirror of the mahogany dresser. “My hair is dripping wet, but you want to know why this chamber is so rich and decorative, is it?”

The girls stood stunned. The queen was a perfectionist. The attendants knew that if anyone failed to do her orders, they would face a terrible wrath.

Born as the princess of Solavazli kingdom, she was known for her beauty, courage, and intelligence. The renowned poets had composed several songs praising her godliness, and it had reached every nook and cranny. Thus, Arava kingdom had to pay a heavy bride price;



huge trunks of cloth, gold, gems, and numerous cattle to get her married to Baladitya. Nonetheless, she was a perfect companion, the woman beside the king during all the lows and highs.

The attendant smiled awkwardly at her. “No... No... Maharani, I was just—”

“Calm down, I am not going to get angry.” She beckoned and Mangala came forward. “Last year, there was a need to trade herbal medicines from Palichanda kingdom for the ailing children. That was when Maharaja had decided to forgo the inlaid gems and stones from the walls of the entire palace, except for this one. Do you know why?”

Mangala shook her head.

“Because this chamber belonged to a very special person of this kingdom, our former ruler Sukamaandran.”

Ministers, chief advisors, council elders, and many more advised, murmured, gossiped, and even forced, that a king’s palace should never be void of grandeur. But he paid no heed. To the king of Arava, nothing mattered, except his people.

The queen quirked her eyebrow. “Now that I have cleared your doubts, will you concentrate on your work?”

Mangala rushed towards her and began towelling her hair. Mangala’s friend concentrated on scrubbing the essence of jasmine on queen’s face. While the other two elder assistants were tying the elephant armlets, and the thick gold girdle around her waist.

Baladitya walked in, his unhurried, slow-paced footsteps echoing in the chamber. The queen raised her hand and flicked her wrist. Immediately, the assistants bowed their heads before filing out of the chamber.

“Badhrani,” the king said, his warm hands sliding down her lean arms.

“Maharaja, where were you?” She turned to face him, straightening the folds of her yellow silk sari. “I did not see you by my side when I woke up.”

“Sleep has become my enemy, Badhrani.” He fetched a sigh. “I was just spending some time in the palace garden.”

The queen had never seen gardening as a man's thing until she saw her husband out there, his angavastram clinging to his sweat and mud on his hands. He had learned how to care for a garden from his grandfather, Sukamaandran, and he loved it still. The neatly raised beds of herbs had a circular lawn with a path around it. Outside the lawn area were four marigold bush beds at each corner of the square field. Besides the field was a small pond filled with pink lotuses, dragonflies flitting around them. The thennai, ashoka, and wild mango trees lined the perfect lawn in their wooden boxes; it was all him.



“Did the alone time help you in finding a solution to the problems?”

He shook his head in dismay. “With some hope, I have announced a meeting with the farmers.”

“Everything will turn out well, Maharaja.”

“Hmm-Hmm.”

The king took a pinch of vermilion from the silver bowl and smeared it on the parting of her hair. Then, his eyes wandered from her loose black hair to her fleshy blossom and stopped at her hip; a perfect hourglass.

Badhrakumari's delicate cheeks reddened as he inched closer and inhaled the scent of jasmine that lingered around her. Slowly taking her shoulders into his arms, he pressed a kiss on her forehead and smiled. When she was about to lean forward to dissolve into his muscular chest, her eyes tore open. She discerned a figure approaching them and instinctively nudged her husband.

"Father!"

A small boy came running towards them, and Baladitya with a broad smile on his face opened his hands to welcome him into a warm embrace. The little boy rushed and dived into his chest, pushing him to the cot behind. He placed quick and chaste kisses on his father's face.

"That was fun," howled the little boy at the top of his voice.

"Yes, it was!"

"Bahubalan!" the queen yelled. "Get off from Maharaja."

He sat upright and cross-legged on his father's chest. "No!"

"Bahubalan! I said get off!" She repeated sternly, but Baladitya gestured her to calm down.

"No, Deva. There is no limit for his naughtiness."

"He is still a kid, Badhrani. He needs to grow up."

"I will grow and rule this kingdom with all-might," the little boy replied, faking a sword in his hand.

"Just like my thathaiyya!" The king extended his hand to caress Bahubalan's hair, but he flinched away.

"Father, do not touch my hair!"

"Why should not he?"

"Mother, everyone likes to ruffle my hair and pinch my cheeks. The maids always mess my hair, especially I hate that old Senthamarai's annoying kisses. Why has father permitted them to touch me, Mother? Are we not the royal he—"

“Bahubalan!” the king interrupted. “You better learn to respect everyone, young man. No one is superior to anyone. They are the ones who help you grow up and Senthamarai ma is older than all of us.”

“This is how he behaves with everyone, Maharaja. He does not stay in a place and breaks everything in the palace. I am so worried.”

“Asking Bahubalan to sit idle is like telling a fire not to burn. His every muscle needs to move, to dance, and jump.”

“Deva, being naughty is different, but being rude? Do you know, yesterday he kept crying to me that he was not able to catch the peacock from the forest.” She shot a glance at Bahubalan, and he was pushing his lips out with a mean moue. “And when I asked him what he wanted to do with it, he showed me a stick and said he wanted to beat it.” The queen raised her brows, expecting her husband to speak up.

“Ahm, I understand your concern, Badhrani. But he is a kid, maybe he was curious.”

“Deva! Curiousness will not involve harming. And he eve—”

“Highness.” An attendant waiting at the threshold of the chamber interrupted Badhrakumari’s laments.

“Yes.”

“Warrior Vishnu is waiting to meet you, Highness.”

“Ask him to wait in the garden, I will come.”

The attendant bowed before marching out of the chamber towards the left.

“Badhrani, we shall talk about this little spring tonight.”

The king looked at Bahubalan. He was trying to break the arched handles of a vase placed on the bedside table.

“Bahubalan,” he called, and the little boy stopped his action and turned towards his father.

“I will finish the meeting, and we will eat together in the afternoon.”

“Okay, Father!” he exclaimed, and threw the petals in the air.

“In a few minutes, come to the durbar for the proceedings, Badhrani.”

She nodded at her husband and turned her attention back to Bahubalan.

The palace garden that stretched for several acres had seen everything in the king’s life. It was in the same garden, he had walked first, he had fallen trying to catch his friends, he had practised his skills, his heart had shattered after losing his grandfather, and it was in the same garden that he had kissed Badhrakumari for the first time. This garden was always special to him, and he would never let it go for anyone.

Baladitya took a deep breath, relishing the scent of freshly bloomed flowers. “Yes, Vishnu. What is the matter?”

The warrior instinctively stood up. “Greetings Maharaja.”



“Tell me, Vishnu.” He sat on his grandfather’s chair and gestured the chief to sit on a bench placed across him.

“There is a plea from an orphan girl my wife knows, Your Highness.”

“Yes, proceed.”

“For several days, someone is misbehaving with her, Your Highness.”



“What?”

“Yes, Maharaja. I am yet to find the person. Also, I am not sure if there is anyone else in my village facing the same problem.”

“Hmm...” Baladitya looked straight ahead, his face contorted with seething anger. If someone dared to misbehave in the kingdom’s capital, he could not think of what was happening in the other villages.

“I will inform the chief police, Vishnu. And what about the girl?”

“She is fine, Your Highness. At present, she is staying with my wife.”

“Good. I will talk with Maharani and we shall arrange a good alliance for her. Tell the girl not to worry.”

“Thank you, Your Highness.” The warrior stood up, bowed, and smiled, flashing a prominent dimple on his left cheek.



\*\*\*

The royal durbar of Arava was attractive. With rich engravings all over the walls and ceilings, beautiful curtains covering the long windows, and handcrafted lanterns at the most perfect places, the chamber was breath taking.

People had gathered in a semicircular enclosed area a few metres away from the throne, to get answers that worried them more than anything did. All they wanted was to survive.

Six years ago, after the mysterious demise of the former king, all the twenty-eight villages surrounding the kingdom had been suffering. Unknown disease for children and no rain for several months leading to a famine. Though everyone believed that the kingdom was cursed and it was going to crumble into pieces, the hope in Baladitya's heart never burnt low. Not a day passed without a prayer to his ancestors, but it seemed they fell on deaf ears.

With hope-filled hearts, the inhabitants were murmuring their piteous situation with each other.

“Jai Maharaja, Jai Maharaja!”

“Long live the ruler of Arava!”

“Long live our highness!”

Baladitya walked into the palace durbar, the sound of his footsteps distinctly heard, even in the loudness of the jubilant cheers. His face resembled a carved sculpture- a sharp nose and a firm jawline. And his eyes, the colour of deep earth, shined.

On his way, his loyal ministers, holding posts of various degrees of power to make his work less tedious, greeted him. The long corridor finally saw its end, and he climbed the few stairs to the throne. He looked to his left at a small platform and a smile broke its way through Baladitya's stony expression. Badhrakumari was sitting on a smaller throne, her head held high.

A young man came forward, his shoulders hunched together. “Maharaja, the farmers have been assembled.”

“Bring them in.”

The farmers walked in, with a vague smile on their faces.

“You may present your problems to our maharaja,” the attendant said and retreated to his position.

The head of the farmers, an old man in loose dhoti, and a white turban, stepped forward and bowed in humility. “Your Majesty, our saviour, we are facing an acute shortage of produce. There is no water for the fields, and the crops are dying. Also, we will not have food to feed us all from next month. It is worrying us all, Your Majesty. Arava is on the brink of a famine.”



“Yes, Parithi ayya. I am aware of the situation and thinking over a solution. Do you have any suggestion?”

“We all feel it is time for us to go to the forest for hun-hunting, Majesty. If-if you could give your approval, some of us sh-shall start the proc—”

“Never!” he yelled, and the king’s voice echoed against the durbar walls. “Animals are our family. Do you suggest killing our family to feed ourselves? Don’t you know that we respect animals like our lords? We do not have the right to take their life for our comfort!”

The aged man’s face wrinkled, and he stood speechless.

“Not for comfort, Your Majesty. But we are begging for our living.” Another farmer beside Parithi interjected.

One of the ministers stood up in a rage. “How dare you raise your voice against our raja?”

Baladitya gestured him to calm down. “Minister, I am here to listen to their voices. They have all the right to raise their voice for them.” He turned to the farmers. “Don’t you think animals have a living? No matter what, we shall never hurt them. They have been sent to this world just like us... nature is common for both of us.”

The farmers bowed their heads and sighed.



After several minutes of absolute silence, the king of Arava said, “As you suggested, we shall go to the forest.”

Parithi looked at his fellow farmers and smiled. His burdened heart had relieved a bit.

“But not for hunting...” the king paused, and everyone was eagerly waiting for him to continue. “We will go to find water.”

Faint murmurings started erupting in the durbar. Discussions, questions, confusions, and unpleasant words.

“Yes, Majesty. Bu... a-af-aft...” Parithi cleared his throat. “But after what happened... no one is ready to go to the forest or near the river Dhara.”

The king sat quietly, gazing at the innocent faces that surrounded him. There is nothing more to think, it is my duty!

He stood up and announced, “I will go to the forest and find us all a solution.”

“Maharaja!” Badhrakumari shrieked.

He turned, and she raised her pleading eyes to his. “Maharaja, you shall not go. Please...”

“Do not worry, Badhrani. If my thathaiyya’s fate awaits me, no one can deny it.”





## അവരവരുടെ വിങ്ങലായ്

Original in Tamil - Er. Poet Muththamizh Virumbi  
Translated in Malayalam - Varadhan

ക്ഷണിച്ചു  
നിൻ ഇടംതേടി വന്നു ക്ഷണിച്ചു.  
എൻ ക്ഷണനത്തെ  
നീ ഏറ്റില്ല  
ഘനീഭവിച്ച  
ദുഃഖവും, വേദനയും  
മുന്നോട്ട് തള്ളുമ്പോൾ  
എന്റെ വീട്ടിലേക്കുള്ള  
വരവിൽ  
നീനോട് ഉരിയാടാനായ്  
ഉള്ളം നിറയുന്നു



Er. Poet Muththamizh Virumbi

എന്നെ നീ സമാധാനിപ്പിച്ചില്ല.  
എങ്കിലും  
ഞാൻ നടന്ന വേഗങ്ങൾ  
മലവെള്ള പാച്ചിൽ പോൽ ...  
കാറ്റേറ്റ കാട്ടുതീ പോൽ....

നാളെ ആടി പേരുക്ക്  
ഞാനും വരുന്നു  
കാവേരീ തീരത്തേക്ക്  
പൊതു പൈപ്പിൽ നിന്ന്  
വെള്ളമെടുത്തോള  
അച്ചു വെല്ലവും, പച്ചരിയും  
തേങ്ങാ പൂളുകൾ കലർത്തി  
ചെറുപ്പത്തെയോർക്കാം  
അവരവരുടെ വിങ്ങലുമായ്





An Elegy wrote in a country yard  
by Henry Gray

The curfew tools the  
knel of parting day,

The lowing herd wind  
slowly o'er the lea,

The plowman homeward  
plods his weary way,

And leaves the world to  
darkness and to me



Henry Gray

இருளும் தனிமையும்

*Translated in Tamil by*

**Prof. Rama. Gurunathan**

அந்திநேர மாலை

பகல்பிரியும் வேளை

வயல்வரப் பினூடே

கால்நடைகள் பலவும்

களைத்தப்படி களைப்புடன்

தொழுவம் நோக்கித்

திரும்பிவரும் வேளை

உழைத்துக் களைத்த

உழவர்களும் மனைக்குத்

திரும்பிவரும் நேரம்

ஊரடங்கி ஒடுங்க

சாவுமணி ஒலித்து

இரவுப் பொழுதினை

அறிவிக்கும் நேரம்

உலகுக்கு இருள்தன்னை

உலவ விட்டுத்

தனியளாய் நின்றுநான்

சிந்தித்த நேரம்



## திருக்குற்றாலக் குறவஞ்சி

(Tamil Original by Thirikuda Rasappa Kavirayar)

தண்ணமு துடன்பிறந்தாய் வெண்ணிலாவே – அந்தத்  
தண்ணளியை ஏன்மறந்தாய் வெண்ணிலாவே  
பெண்ணுடன் பிறந்ததுண்டே வெண்ணிலாவே – என்றான்  
பெண்மைகண்டும் காயலாமோ வெண்ணிலாவே.

விண்ணிலே பிறந்ததற்கோ வெண்ணிலாவே – எரு  
விட்டுநான் எறிந்ததற்கோ வெண்ணிலாவே  
கண்ணில்விழி யாதவர்போல் வெண்ணிலாவே – மெத்தக்  
காந்தியாட்டம் ஆடுகிறாய் வெண்ணிலாவே.

ஆகடியம் செய்தல்லவோ வெண்ணிலாவே – நீதான்  
ஆட்கடியன் போற்குறைந்தாய் வெண்ணிலாவே  
மோகன்வரக் காணோன்என்றால் வெண்ணிலாவே – இந்த  
வேகமுனக் கானதென்ன வெண்ணிலாவே.

நாகமென்றே எண்ணவேண்டாம் வெண்ணிலாவே – இது  
வாகுசுழற் பின்னல் கண்டாய் வெண்ணிலாவே  
கோகனாக வீறழித்தாய் வெண்ணிலாவே – திரி  
கூடலிங்கர் முன்போய்க் காய்வாய் வெண்ணிலாவே



## Blaming the moon

(Translated in English by Dr. C. Rajeswari)

Oh, white Moon!  
You born with ambrosia boon  
Why do you forget to be cool?

Oh, white Moon!  
Have you ever born with a girl?  
Oh, white Moon!  
Is it right to burn the girlhood?

Oh, white Moon!  
As you are born in the sky  
You do this to me?  
Or as I threw you for a ritual You do this to me?

Oh white Moon!  
Like a person who hates to look at me  
You play with heat and punish me

Oh, white Moon!  
You are unfair to me

Oh, white Moon!  
You wane as a slave

Oh, white Moon!  
I am waiting for my lover

Why are you aggressive  
and fury

Oh white Moon!  
Don't think this is a snake  
This is my long black plait

You destroy the pride of lotus  
Go and burn Siva of Kutraalam



**Original Abitha Shreenivasan**

You are my only best friend  
Who will stay with me till the end

You are my only strength  
About him words cannot be used even at  
great length

You are a great coach  
For whom I can fully vouch

You are my only energy of positivity  
Boosting happiness with great capability

You are my only guide  
About whom I can take pride"

**Translated in Tamil**

**Dr. C. Rajeswari**

என் உயிர்த் தோழன் நீ  
இறுதி வரை நீ  
என்னோடு இருப்பாய்

என் ஒரே வலிமை நீ  
உன்னைப் பற்றி  
நிறைய நிறையப் பேச வேண்டாம்

என் ஒரே ஆக்க சக்தி நீ  
என்னுள் இன்பத்தை  
கிளர்த்த  
உன்னால் முடியும்

என் ஒரே வழிகாட்டி நீ  
என் ஒரே பெருமிதமும் நீ







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